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SETH LUCKET'S COURTING.

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"Miss Katie, will you marry me?"

Never was there a more surprised girl in the world, and a very indignant one too, than pretty Katie Cummings, when Seth Lucket came to her, and with as much coolness and composure as though she had given him reason to believe such a question would be agreeable to her, asked her to marry him.

"Seth Lucket, what do you mean?" she said.

"Just what I say, Miss Katie."

"I have never given you cause to believe for a moment I would—"

"No; not to *believe*, Miss Katie, but certainly to *hope* so. You have always been kind to me, and— Well, I don't know how to do this thing of courting just as it should be, may be. It's a new thing to me. But I will just tell you how I feel. You've been always kind to me, and I've grown to think a great deal of you; and if you can love me, why, there's nothing on earth that is right but what I'll do for you. I don't drink, chew, nor smoke. I'm not fond of card playing, nor given to profane language. There is not much bad in me. Will you have me?"

"Not much good either. Thank you. No, I will not," Katie answered, her indignation a little mollified by Seth's earnest, respectful manner.

"No? Well, may be not. But I would have tried to grow better for your sake. I'm sorry—a little disappointed. But it won't hurt bad, nor very long. I'm glad I spoke, and found out before it grew any worse with me. There is nothing like taking a thing in time. Perhaps I can find some one else who will take me. It won't make much difference in the end. All young girls are lovely to me, all women good. And I'm sure to love any one who loves me. Don't feel bad about it, Miss Katie. I don't blame you for what you can't help. Good-evening."

And Seth moved away, whistling

"Coming through the rye."

And Katie exclaimed:

"Well, I declare he is an original. I'll wager something pretty he will court every girl in this village before six months have passed! Let me count how many. May Garner, Gertie Ashley, Fannie Bartlett, Georgie and Ada Campbell—I believe that's all, old enough for him to court during that time—with myself, six. One a month. Oh, I forgot. May be it is possible he might ask Louise Gaines—hardly. She is a little too old for him. Let me see. He is thirty, she thirty-two, although she does not look it. If he had wanted her he would have asked her first, because he always has waited on her since he first called himself a man. I wonder what has come over the fellow, just to think of going a courting?"

Seth was a really good young man. No one in the village could say a word against his moral character. His want of energy was all his friends could complain of. He owned a little bit of a place, and managed to work it just enough to make a crop sufficient to keep him in clothes and enough to eat. But all he had he was always ready to give away, to any one more needy; generous to a fault. Folks said he would give his head away if he could.

Well, to the villagers' surprise, Seth was trying then to give his heart away.

"I must get a wife to take care of me and what I've got," said Seth.

He was just a little disappointed when the prettiest girl in the village refused him. But as he had said, he could love any one who would love him. He possessed the greatest respect for all women. The memory of his mother, whom he really worshipped, made him do it "for mother's sake," he said.

It seemed rather presumptuous for Seth, with such a meagre amount of the world's possessions, to think of the girls mentioned. But nevertheless he did; and in three months more had been refused by the Campbell girls and May Garner. At first the girls each kept their secret; but it leaked out, and a merry time they had. Not one of them could flatter herself, though, that he was wounded much by *her* loss.

Seth possessed a good deal of quiet humor, and was pretty good company; always ready to be of any service he could to the girls. So, although they laughed at and snubbed him sometimes, they always made it right by doing better the next time they met him.

One day Seth left the village and went to the city; when, after staying four or five days, he returned, saying he had been having his wedding suit made. This he told Fannie Bartlett, who asked:

"Why, who on earth is going to have *you*, Seth? Excuse me—I mean, who are you going to marry?"

"I'm not quite certain *yet*; but somebody *sure*. And I thought it as well to have my suit ready, while I had the money to pay for it too," answered Seth.

And Fannie, trying to keep back her laughter, brought the tears into her eyes, which perhaps Seth misunderstood, for he said:

"Don't cry, Fannie; there is a chance for you yet. But I won't ask you until I do the right thing first. Here—look at this! It is the picture of a nice young man who wants me to tell you he has seen you, and sets a lot of store by you. And if you 'll have him, you won't regret it."

Fannie took the picture and looked at it, Seth eagerly watching her countenance, which expressed a good deal of perplexity.

"I've seen this young man somewhere; but, to save me, I cannot tell where," said Fannie.

"I think you have," answered Seth.

"But where? Tell me, Seth." She looked beseechingly into Seth's face. "Why, Seth Lucket, this an't you? I do believe— No. I declare it *is*—and it is *not*. Why, this is an elegant looking man, and *you*—"

"That's so, Fannie; but to relieve your perplexity, I'll tell you, and save you the trouble of telling me how I look. That's the way I intend to look when I am in my wedding suit, and when there is a Mrs. Lucket for me to look well to please. Don't you understand? Now I'll tell you how I got it done so. I went first and set for my picture at the photograph gallery; then I took it to a lady who has the most wonderful talent, folks say, and I know it myself now. I told her to fix me up, not as I *was*, but as I *ought* to be, to please my lady-love, in the style—hair and dress, whiskers and mustache. So she has done it well. Will you have the picture *now*, and me afterward as soon as you please?"

"No, indeed; for I truly believe, Seth, you are crazy, and will end your days in the lunatic asylum."

"All right, Fannie; I'm a *little* sorry. You might do worse. And if you won't have me, somebody else may," said Seth; and he went his way, smiling gently, and thinking, why could not the girls take a liking to him?

One more remained of the real young girls, and in due time Seth presented himself to her. This was Gertie Ashley—not near as pretty as some of the others, but a sweet, sensible girl, who, when Seth asked her to have him, said:

"You are too late, Seth. Somebody else thinks more of me than you do, I know; for he has asked me during the time you have been asking so many. Possibly, if you had come six months ago, I might have said Yes.

But I'm much obliged to you, Seth, and I think, with you, some of these girls may go further and fare worse. I know you will make a good husband, and I know somebody who would make you a good wife; but from a rumor I heard this morning, I fear you will be too late there too. They say Parson Smiley is after Louise."

"What!" exclaimed Seth, starting up. "How dare he come after her? I'll make him *smile* on the wrong side of his mouth. *He* marry Louise! or any other man get her! Not while I'm about."

"Why, Seth, what do you mean? She does not belong to you or any one else, poor girl. She is alone in the world now—"

"Yes, she does. No, she an't either. Where am I? Haven't I been waiting on her for years? Although I never thought of marrying her myself, I never thought of any one else doing so. I've always intended Louise should be with me when I have a nice home and a wife. Parson Smiley have Louise! No, I vow he shall not!" Seth said, every moment waxing warmer. And seizing his hat, he darted out, without saying "good-bye."

A moment, and he was back again, saying:

"Excuse me, Gertie: good-bye. And I'm much obliged to you for what you've said. You are the best friend I've got, and I will never forget that *you* brought me to my senses."

Right to Louise's home he went. She had

recently lost her mother. When coming to offer consolation, Parson Smiley had learned how good and lovely she was.

Seth found the parson there. They sat quite sociably until nine o'clock. Then the parson looked at his watch, then at Seth, and sat on. Half-past nine, and the reverend gentleman grew restless; looked again at his watch, again at Seth. And still Seth sat. Ten o'clock, and another look at the great silver time-keeper, with an exclamation about "not dreaming it was so late."

Another half hour, and they both sat—not on a bed of roses, I'm sure. The parson made a move as if to go. But Seth moved not, unless to fix himself firmer in the great arm-chair. Louise tried to be agreeable and entertaining, but she was very tired, and wondered why they both did not go, and more particularly what kept Seth.

The parson, finding his rival did not second his movement, had relapsed again to quietness for a time. Then in desperation he said:

"It surely cannot be eleven o'clock. I must be fast. Have you the time, Mr. Lucket?"

"No, sir. If I had, it would be sure to be *slow*, and like me, never in a hurry," answered Seth, going deeper down and further back in his chair.

With a look that ought to have moved Seth, the parson said:

"So I see, sir. Good-night."

Louise accompanied him to the passage, holding the lamp for him to get his coat and hat. And Seth heard him say:

"I will call to-morrow afternoon, if you are not engaged."

And Louise answered:

"I shall be at home."

"Curse him, I was going to say," Seth muttered.

He was looking cross enough, when Louise came in and asked:

"Now what is it, Seth? Something wrong with you? Has Gertie Ashley refused you?"

"Yes, and I am glad she did. She's a splendid girl. But do you think I care if the girls, every one of them except *you*, refuse me?"

"Oh, Seth, Seth! now you are too bad. You have courted every girl in the village, and in desperation come to the old maid at last—"

"Stop, Louise! You know I've been waiting on you for ten years. And *I* know that it is because I have liked you better than all others, that their refusals never hurt me. Now this evening Gertie told me about the parson, and it was that which brought me to my senses. I never dreamed or intended you to marry any one. And now I declare, if you don't have me, I'll do something desperate. I always thought of you as belonging to me in some way. So you have got to take *me* or no one."

"Seth, look at me," said Louise gravely.

Seth did, and she saw he was really in earnest. She continued:

"Parson Smiley will ask me to be his wife to-morrow—"

"I'll choke him, so he can't," interrupted Seth.

"Hush, Seth. Of course I do not love him; but he is kind and good; and I am lonely, and with few friends, if any."

"I'm worth a dozen, if you only would believe it."

"Yes, Seth. But I saw you were determined to find some one else to love, so I have tried to think of you as belonging to any one but me; and so I thought I might be at least peaceful and contented in the parsonage."

"Now, Louise, let us settle this matter for ever. I *like* you. If I find I'm safe in doing so, I'll *love* you; and when I love, it is in truth. I've never yet told any girl I loved her, and they will tell you so. Now, will you take me? Marry me to-morrow?"

"Oh, not to-morrow, Seth. Indeed I cannot. But sometime I will, if you wish," Louise said quietly.

And Seth, kissing her, drew her down beside him, and said:

"I declare I never knew how pretty you were before. Now I won't try to tell you how thankful I am for your promise; but I'll tell you just why I want this matter fixed up to-morrow."

Seth told his reasons, and Louise's brown eyes grew larger, and looked as a child's when hearing a wonderful fairy story. When he had finished, he asked:

"Now will you have me to-morrow, Louise; or shall I leave you?"

"I will go with you, Seth," Louise said.

The next day Parson Smiley received a note from her, saying she would not be home as she had promised. She was then about leaving the village, to be absent for some time.

The parson could not understand what it meant until Gertie Ashley, who, with her betrothed, William Lawton, a young lawyer, having accompanied Seth and Louise to town, returned and announced the marriage.

The surprise of the parson, and the villagers generally, may be imagined, but where Seth got money enough to get married on was a mystery. He had told several that he had gotten his wedding suit ready, and that was all they knew about it. Some declared they were travelling on the little bit of fortune Louise's mother left her—about two hundred dollars. If William Lawton knew more about it he said nothing, until one day, about a week after, the young lawyer displayed a letter he had just taken from the office, from Seth Lucket, written on the eve of his departure for Europe, to settle up the estate of an old uncle, who had left him "a little remembrance," Seth wrote.

A year after, Seth came again among them, looking, as he told Fannie Bartlett he was going to, when he had a wife to look well for—as elegant a young man as the picture he showed her. Louise's travel had wonderfully improved her, and no one for a moment doubted her being very happy, notwithstanding she knew her husband had asked six girls before her. Gertie Ashley was on the eve of her wedding. Seth and Louise insisted they should come to their home in the city, and extended the invitation to the five other girls, offering such inducements that they all gladly accepted. None of them had ever beheld such a magnificent establishment as Louise presided over; and each one but Gertie, I truly think, would have been better pleased if Louise had not looked quite so healthy and strong: no prospect in view of Seth ever being in the matrimonial market again. Oh, if it should be, I am sure never would be heard again the question, "Who would have Seth Lucket?" The "little remembrance" proved to be more than a million of dollars.